

# 16 Best Places to Travel in 2016

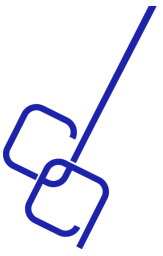
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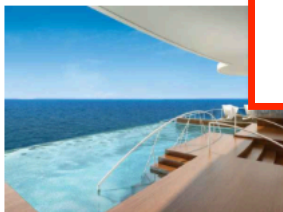
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Best Cruises for 2016

## 16 Places to Go in 2016

We've handpicked the best travel destinations of 2016 — some familiar and some not — and we're sharing our insider tips for the best time to plan your trip.



27 Photos That Will Make You  
Want to Travel



The Big Island Like You've  
Never Seen it Before

# Islands

## 16 Best Places to Travel in 2016

BEST TRAVEL DESTINATIONS OF THE YEAR

We've handpicked the best travel destinations of 2016 — some familiar and some not — and we're sharing our insider tips for the best time to plan your trip. The biggest challenge will be choosing your favorite.



### 1. SEYCHELLES

Spread across 175 square miles of the Indian Ocean, this chain of 115 islands has become (slightly) more accessible with the introduction of [Crystal Cruises'](#) first small-capacity yacht, *Crystal Esprit*. The 62-guest, all-suite ship will spend its maiden season sailing into some of the smaller ports of call in the Seychelles, departing from Dubai. If you prefer to remain on land, The [H Resort Beau Vallon Beach](#) debuted this past August as the only five-star beachfront hotel in Mahé, the archipelago's largest island. And come spring, [Six Senses Zil Pasyon](#) will open on its own 640-acre isle; even if you don't opt to stay in one of the 47 villas that make up the resort, you can still boat over for meals or drinks. **When to go:** Year-round; the islands sit outside the cyclone belt.



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Cozumel

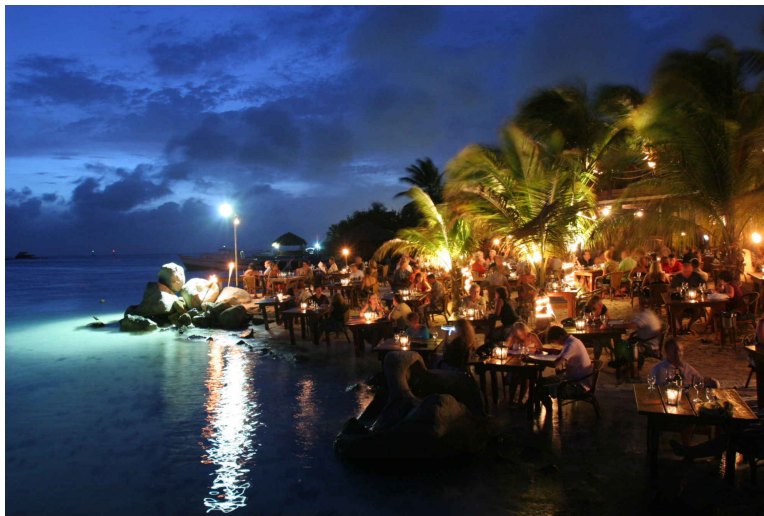
memorial totem poles. **When to go:** May to September.

## 2. COZUMEL

In 2016, travel to this Mexican isle will be easier — and less expensive. A new ferry company, [Barcos Caribe Cozumel](#), will shuttle travelers from Playa del Carmen, raising the total number of boat companies serving the island to three. Once on Cozumel, wander through the revamped gardens and fountains at Parque Benito Juarez, which offers free Wi-Fi, and breathe deeply at the world's first underwater oxygen bar, [Clear Lounge Cozumel](#). Also underwater: new exploratory dives to sites with pristine reefs are being led just north of the island. After dark, stargaze from the astrological observatory at the new [Cha'an Ka'an Cozumel Planetarium](#). **When to go:** January through July, but avoid spring break.

## 3. HAIDA GWAII, CANADA

Off the coast of British Columbia, Haida Gwaii (formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands) houses some 5,000 people on its 150 islands. Accommodations are limited to just two of these, Graham and Moresby, which together see about 24,000 visitors a year. Annual tourism to Gwaii Haanas National Park, however, is capped at just 2,000. Enter [Steppes Travel](#), with an easier, more comfortable way to explore the destination. Its brand-new, May-to-July itinerary includes seven nights on Swell, a century-old tugboat turned six-cabin, 12-passenger expedition cruising ship. You'll observe a variety of wildlife — humpback whales, black bears and bald eagles — and visit several cultural sites, including SGang Gwaay Haida village, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to see its hand carved



## 4. ARUBA

With a geographic position just north of Venezuela and just south of the hurricane belt, Aruba boasts nearly perfect weather, making it an ideal year-round locale. Adding to that appeal for 2016? New and improved resorts and an event foodies will love. A total of \$100 million was invested in new hotels and enhancements to existing properties. The all-inclusive [Riu Palace Antillas](#) opened late last year; the [Renaissance Aruba Resort & Casino](#) updated the rooms in its adults-only Marina and family-friendly Ocean Suites areas; and both the [Marriott Aruba Hotel](#) and [Holiday Inn Resort Aruba](#) received face-lifts. The former Radisson Aruba, a historic Morris Lapidus-designed beachfront property, recently became the [Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino](#), and by year's end, a trio of [Divi Resorts](#) will have completed their upgrades. On the food scene, Aruba is getting a taste of the farm-to-table movement. Its first-ever [Eat Local Aruba Restaurant Week](#), during which some 55 eateries created special wallet-friendly locavore menus, debuted last fall and will return in late September. But the island celebrates great local food any time of year; it won the 2015 TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice award for the best fine dining in the Caribbean. **When to go:** June through November, when most of the region's weather is unpredictable.



## 5. SCOTLAND

The launch of Scotland's [North Coast 500](#) loop has opened up the country's Highlands and northernmost shores in a new and much more accessible way. Intrepid travelers can now explore its rural and rugged landscapes by car, bicycle or even on foot. An added boon: Recently added flights to Aberdeen on [Icelandair](#) make it easier than ever to get to nearby Inverness, the capital of the Highlands and the perfect place to start the trip. The scenic 500-mile route — which can be driven in its entirety in as little as three days — combines nature and adventure, food and drink, history and culture. You will pass towering mountain ranges, centuries-old ruins and monumental castles. And you can see what all the Hollywood buzz is about with a side trip to the Isle of Skye, off Scotland's northwest coast. Its wild, weathered, windswept landscapes have recently been featured in *Macbeth*, starring Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard, and J.J. Abrams's just-released *Star Wars* epic. **When to go:** High summer, when daylight stretches until 11 p.m.

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## 6. AZORES, PORTUGAL

Last spring, [Ryanair](#) and [EasyJet](#) began offering low-cost flights to connect the Azores' capital city of Ponta Delgada, on the main island of Sao Miguel, to London and Lisbon, raising the profile of this nine-island chain dramatically. Americans will also find them surprisingly easy to reach, thanks to four-hour direct flights from Boston on [SATA](#). Reasons to visit: A 450-mile network of hiking trails recently debuted on the island of Santa Maria, where the soon-to-open [Charming Blue](#) will offer 15 residential-style rooms. On Sao Miguel, the striking volcanic stone and concrete [Arquipelago Contemporary Arts Centre](#) just bowed, as did Design Hotels' 55-room [Furnas Boutique Hotel](#), featuring a spring-fed thermal spa. **When to go:** Mild climate year-round, but rainy season is November through March.

## 7. BARBADOS

This former British colony celebrates the 50th anniversary of its independence on November 30, bringing with it an ample amount of festivals. Expect the usual annual autumn events, such as the [Barbados Food & Wine and Rum Festival](#) and the National Independence Festival of Creative Arts, along with special one-offs, like the Barbados 50, a transatlantic rally that will see boats traveling from London to West Africa to the Caribbean between July and November. It closes out a big year of sailing events, which include the 80th anniversary of the [Mount Gay Round Barbados Race Series](#) in mid-January, as well as the [GPI4 World Championships](#) in late March. **When to go:** Year-round, but November is the height of the independence celebrations.



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Azores



## 8. MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO, MYANMAR

Up until a few years ago, it was almost impossible to travel to this out-there set of 800 islands spread across 10,000 square miles in the Andaman Sea off Myanmar's southern coast. Even as the political situation improved in the country, the only way to experience this pristine, practically empty archipelago was by wooden boat. Now, smartly appointed, state-of-the-art yachts are sailing here from ports in Phuket, Thailand, letting sophisticated travelers tour these jungled, mountainous sand- and coral-ringed atolls without sacrificing modern comforts and conveniences. Top Asia-travel expert [Remote Lands](#) has begun five-day cruises around many of the islands, giving guests access to exclusive dive sites teeming with turtles, stingrays, sharks and seahorses. Beyond diving, travelers can explore villages of the local Moken population, otherwise known as "sea gypsies," a hunter-gatherer maritime tribe who have called these waters home for millennia. **When to go: November to March, outside of monsoon season.**



## 9. CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA

Cartagena, on the Caribbean coast, boasts colorful colonial architecture and fantastic food, but its vibrant arts scene is often overlooked. This January brings the 10th incarnation of the [Classical Music Festival](#), followed by the Southern Hemisphere edition of the U.K.'s literary [Hay Festival](#). The city's thriving contemporary music scene can be experienced via a new tour, Ruta Champetua, from on-the-ground experts Cartagena Insider, which introduces travelers to the world of the local Afro-Caribbean-Spanish champetua sound. Cultural center Ciudad Movil features a slate of creative performances, plus a new courtyard restaurant, Fedora Libro Cafe. Come spring, the hot spot to stay will be the 42-room [Tcherassi Hotel + Spa](#); with a rooftop pool and restaurant, the flagship is decorated by Cartagena native and top New York designer Richard Mishaan. And all this comes at a bargain, too: The U.S. dollar has been steadily climbing against the Colombian peso; at press time, \$1 U.S. equals 3,100 COP. **When to go: The festivals take place in January and the weather is dry through April — the humid wet season starts in May.**

## 10. SEA ISLAND & JEKYLL ISLAND, GEORGIA

Many changes are afoot on these barrier islands, long a favorite of Southerners. Sea Island will see the 1928 Mediterranean-style Cloister hotel expand this spring with the 63-room Garden Wing, while the nearby eight-room Lodge at Broadfield was entirely rebuilt last fall after a devastating fire. New on Jekyll Island: 200-room LEED-certified The Westin Jekyll Island and a 157-room Holiday Inn Resort, along with a Beach Village retail area. A remastered Campground Pavilion makes sleeping under the stars much more comfortable, and this fall finds the opening of Jekyll Island Suites, whose 41 two- and three-bedroom accommodations will cater to families. And February 4 to 6, Sea Island goes Edwardian one last time for its annual Downton Abbey event, coinciding with the show's final season. **When to go: Late spring and early fall.**



## 11. AUSTRALIA

Now's your chance to delve deeply into indigenous customs across the continent — beyond the Red Centre and Outback — through projects and companies owned by the aboriginal tribes. Barradict is offering a new trip in the northern Kimberley region of Western Australia, where indigenous guides lead guests on helifishing tours and sea turtle-monitoring projects. In the south, Koomal Dreaming has new programs where guests can forage for bush food, then learn how to cook their finds with native chef Josh Whiteland. Near the Nitmiluk Gorge of the Northern Territory, the 100 percent aboriginal-owned outfit Pudakul has launched flat-bottom boat tours led by guides from the Jawoyn tribe. This tribe also owns the area's Cicada Lodge, a 3-year-old pioneer in high-end, indigenous-owned hotels. **When to go: Varies depending on which tour you choose, but generally May to September.**

## 12. MYKONOS, GREECE

While the uncertainties of Greece's economy and the ongoing migrant crisis might have dampened the desire of some travelers to plan an Aegean holiday, the party never stopped on Mykonos. In fact, this past season saw an unprecedented number of openings on the hotel, spa and restaurant fronts. The attention-grabbing arrival for 2016 looks to be a second hotel from Bill & Coo; this one, Bill & Coo Coast, will have 15 rooms on 2½ coastal acres just outside of Mykonos town. It will join two recent standouts: the 25-key, minimalist Mykonos Blanc, on Ornos Beach, and Mykonos No. 5, in town, whose budget-friendly 11 residential-style rooms have kitchens and terraces. New spots to see and be seen include Scorpios, a beach club on the island's south coast featuring performance spaces and an indoor-outdoor restaurant; Buddha Bar-Beach, a seaside lounge at the recently redone Santa Marina Hotel & Villas in Ornos; and Hakkasan group's upmarket contemporary Chinese spot Ling Ling. Plus Athens's beloved health-food joint Nice-n-Easy just introduced good-for-you fare to the beach. **When to Go: Late May through June or September, to avoid the crowds.**



### 13. PANAMA CITY, PANAMA

After an epic, yearslong feat of engineering, Panama's famed canal will reveal its new lane this spring. Tour company [Ancon Expeditions](#) will offer behind-the-scenes construction tours, some by helicopter, others by Zodiac boat. In town, the historic Casco Viejo district, which saw the arrival of the [American Trade Hotel](#) and [Tantalo Hotel](#) in 2013, continues to attract trendy travelers on a budget (a boutique hotel is planned in a pair of colonial-era buildings). On the luxury front, [Ritz-Carlton, Panama](#), will open a 29-story tower with 220 rooms, four restaurants, two pools and a spa in the city's heart by year's end. And the national airline [Copa](#) just added direct flights from New Orleans and San Francisco. **When to go:** Spring, after the canal opens.

### 14. NEW PLYMOUTH, NEW ZEALAND

This port city on the west coast of the North Island offers an intriguing mix of culture, architecture and contemporary art, including the [Len Lye Museum](#), named for and devoted to one of NZ's most famous artists. But outside city limits, it's all about adventure. There's the reopened 11-mile Pouakai Crossing, which traverses mountains high above New Plymouth. Cyclists can sign up for [Venturo's Forgotten Highway Cycling Tour](#), a 350-mile, six-day ride across some of North Island's most rugged and remote terrain, led by two-time Olympian Tim Gudsell. An easier-option is [Forgotten World Adventures' new Rail Bike Tours](#), where riders gently pedal through the countryside on nearly 90 miles of unused train tracks, riding in converted rail carts. **When to go:** Spring or fall in the Southern Hemisphere.

### 15. ISLAMORADA

No need to head to Key West to get that retro-chic Keys flavor. On Islamorada, [Amara Cay](#) recently opened in a former (and now totally unrecognizable) Hampton Inn, bringing smart, affordable digs — and Oltremare Ristorante, a restaurant specializing in Italian cuisine with a Floridian twist — to the beach. Several other area hotels received recent revamps, including the hipster-friendly Postcard Inn. And beer lovers will find there's more to this destination than daiquiris: The [Florida Keys Brewing Company](#) opened last March, brewing their suds on site and joining the 14-month-old Islamorada Beer Company. [Historic Upper Keys Walking Tours](#) now ends its new fact-filled Happy Hour History Tour at the Brewing Company with a draught on the house. (The company's equally new Indian Key Historic State Park tour is also interesting, even without the alcohol.) And this Upper Key is having a moment in the spotlight: The Netflix series *Bloodline*, which is set (and shoots) here, starts its second season this year with new cast member John Leguizamo. **When to go:** January and February, with temps in the high 70s.



## 16. SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is becoming an easier place to navigate: Enhanced infrastructure has increased connectivity between the capital of Colombo, the old town of Galle, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and Yale National Park in the south — plus the recently revived Queen of Jaffna train also links Colombo to the north. Travel outfitters are taking notice: Abercrombie & Kent has two new trips planned to Sri Lanka in 2016, while Black Tomato will debut cycling journeys along the south coast, water safaris in the relatively untouched eastern national park of Gal Oya, and sunrise treks up tea country's Adam's Peak, the nation's highest mountain. New hotels include Sri Lanka Collection's Fort Bazaar, set in the 400-year-old Galle Fort. **When to go: December to mid-April for the best weather.**